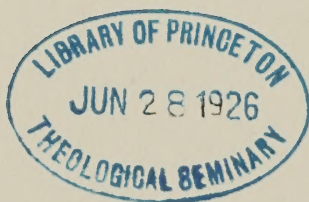
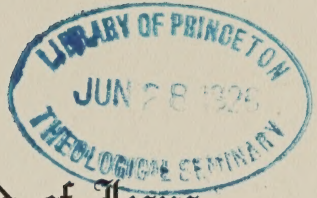
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Studies of the
Mind of Jesus



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Studies of the Mind of Jesus

BY

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(ABERDEEN)

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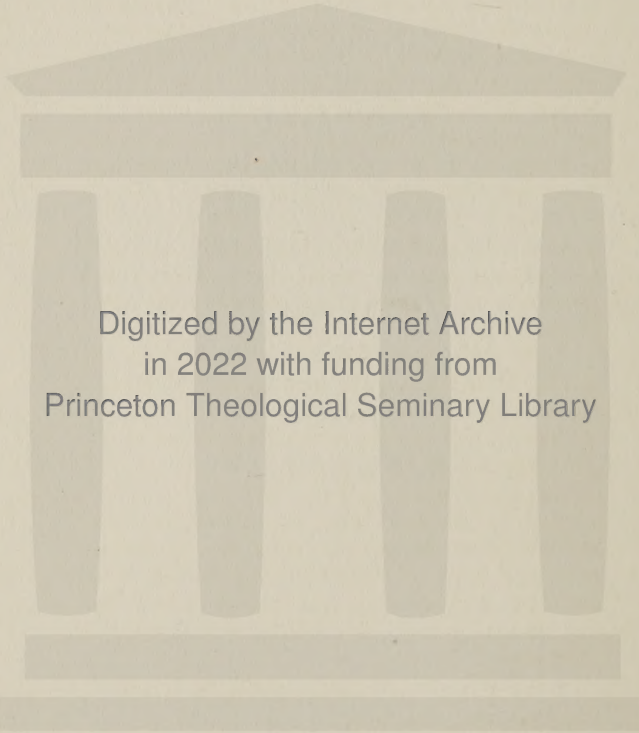
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to all my friends in

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PLYMOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, SEATTLE, WASH.
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, PITTSFIELD, MASS.

to whom it has been
my privilege to
preach

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS



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Foreword


FIVE YEARS AGO, in an effort to reach, with the Christian message, those in the city who were not in the habit of attending any church, we decided to hold a service every Sunday evening, in a theatre. Almost from the first these services proved, from the point of view of numbers, highly successful. Many who attended them had not been inside a church for years. The audiences included some who were strangers to the New Testament, and who knew little of the meaning of the Gospel. But from week to week, through five seasons, the interest was maintained and, according to credible reports, much good accomplished through such sermons as are offered to the public in this book.

I am well aware that the authorities on the science of homiletics will find much to criticise in these pages. The nature of my audience demanded the use of colloquialisms, familiarities and repetitions that would be out of place in any ordinary pulpit, and I have no hope that anyone deeply versed in Christian ways of thinking will learn anything here. At the same time, the sermons are published with the thought that they may reach and help such persons as those to whom they, and many others like them, were originally addressed.

HUGH GORDON ROSS

Pittsfield, Massachusetts

The Supreme Teacher

ERY late one night, or rather, very early one morning, Socrates,—one of the most famous teachers in the history of the world,—was lying in his bed asleep. He was roused by a tremendous hammering upon his door, and when he called to the person outside to enter, he saw coming into his room a young Athenian friend of his who was evidently full of excitement. Socrates asked him what brought him to his house at that unearthly hour of the day and he said, “Haven’t you heard the news?” “What news?” “Why,” he said, “Protagoras has come to town. Don’t you know that Protagoras is one of the greatest teachers in the world? Don’t you want to come and hear what he has to say? How can you lie in your bed when a man like that is teaching in the city? Get your clothes on and let’s go and listen to him.” And that young man would give Socrates no peace and no rest until he got out of his bed, put on his clothes and went with him to the house where Protagoras was teaching.

As I have read that famous old story,—which you will find in the beginning of the dialogue of Plato which bears the name of “Protagoras”—this has passed through my mind:—What would happen if it should become known in the middle of this approaching night, that Jesus Christ of Nazareth, in the very form and fashion that he wore in the days of His

flesh, had arrived in this city, and was teaching in one of our homes? What do you think would happen? Of course, it is probably a little bold to answer for other people; and yet I feel inclined to say that, if that message were to reach our slumbering homes a few hours after we leave this building,—there would not be a man or a woman, or a child able to walk, who would not go as fast as legs could carry them, to the place where Jesus Christ was to be found and heard! What an experience it would be, to be able to stand around and listen to that holy voice speaking as it spoke its wondrous messages to the people two thousand years ago!

While that, of course, is impossible and unthinkable, in the providence of God it so happens that we have in all our homes, I hope, a copy of a large part of the teaching of Jesus Christ. We can go home tonight and open our New Testament and we can listen, as we read, to the very words that Jesus uttered, although not, of course, in our language, as He spoke those parables and as He preached those sermons to the people among whom He lived. I regard that,—and I am sure you agree with me in regarding that,—as one of the greatest privileges which we as rational beings enjoy,—the privilege of being able to come into touch whenever we please with the mind of Jesus. Here in these Sunday evening hours, that is the very thing that we hope to do. We are simply going to sit around the feet of Jesus and we are going to find out what He has to say to us on the questions which He Himself discussed.

Do you believe that it is possible for a group of thoughtful men and women like ourselves to spend half an hour with Jesus every Sunday evening, without deriving great profit to ourselves and without making, through that profit, a precious contribution to the religious thinking and to the religious behaviour of the community to which we belong? I do not believe that is possible. I believe that it is inevitable that, if we come humbly and reverently to learn of this supreme Teacher, there will come into our lives new light and new power and new patience and new insight and new zeal and new forbearance and new passion for holy things; and if our lives are touched and changed in those ways, we can not but touch and change the lives of others. What a noble thing it would be if we could make a contribution like that to the life of this city where we live!

Let us think this evening for a few moments of some of the qualities of the teaching of Jesus, which make it desirable and profitable for us to sit at his feet and learn of Him. First of all, there is the quality of simplicity. I mentioned a few moments ago the name of one of the great teachers of the world—Plato. Well now, a man needs to be a fairly studious individual in order to make very much of Plato. Plato's teaching comes to us in a form which it is very difficult to appreciate and understand; and so if you were to go through America tonight and count the men and women in the country who really know Plato, you would be surprised to find how few they are. But Jesus comes to us with His great and gracious messages embodied in the very simplest forms of

language, so that even a little child can make something of them and rejoice in their beauty.

That is the difficulty with some of these teachers,—the great scientists and the great philosophers,—we can't understand them; perhaps they are trying to say something very good and very wonderful but we can't understand them. A few weeks ago there was a famous scientist giving a lecture on physics in Liverpool, and the lecture was put on the radio; and the next morning people asked, "What on earth was that we had on the radio last night? We didn't understand a single word of it; we don't want to hear a thing like that again." There weren't a hundred men in England who understood that.

Could you find a hundred men in America who would not understand anything Jesus said, if we were to read some of these messages of the Son of God? How grateful we ought to be, and how grateful many of us are, that Jesus spoke so simply! And one of the qualities of the simplicity of Jesus was the way in which He bound up some of His utterances in these memorable little phrases. We read some of them tonight. "Ye are the light of the world." "Ye are the salt of the earth." "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." "In My Father's house are many mansions." "I am the good shepherd." Why, we could mention hundreds of exquisite little sentences like those, which could be picked at random, which we can not forget once we have heard them. They simply stick in our souls forever, doing us wondrous good. That is the first quality we are all glad of—the simplicity of the teaching of Jesus; for we are not all

great scholars, and, if it were difficult, a great many of us would never understand or enjoy it at all!

There is another thing—it is the atmosphere of the teaching of Jesus. Did you ever notice, as you read the New Testament, how Jesus always deals with the great and the supreme matters of human interest? He is always on the high and lofty levels of thought and speech, talking to us about God or about our own destiny or about the ways and the means which we may employ to make our lives more radiant and more fruitful in every good and lovely thing.

And the consequence of that is this: That there is not a man or a woman or a child in the world who is not capable of being interested in the message of Jesus. You can think tonight of lots of things that all the people in the world are not interested in. For instance, who is going to be the next president of the United States? That may be a very interesting question to you, but there are millions of people in the world who don't care who is going to be the next president of the United States. Is Germany to continue to be a Republic? Well, there are people in this country and in other countries who are interested in that question, but there are many millions who are not interested in it at all. I can imagine myself going into your home and asking you that question, and your answer would be: "What do I care? That doesn't interest me. I am interested in other things." Come and look at the people who are sitting around the feet of Jesus tonight; just shut your eyes a moment and get that picture before your imagination,—Jesus Christ's class; the great men—statesmen, merchants,

scientists, and they are sitting around listening to Jesus, learning of Him; the simple, uneducated, untutored people—thousands and thousands of them, in India, China, Africa,—there they are in the group, and what hundreds of thousands of bright and happy little children who know nothing at all about these political and diplomatic questions that interest some of us—there they sit around Jesus, listening and drinking it all in to their little souls.

There never was in the history of the world another teacher who had a class like the class that Jesus teaches,—all sorts and conditions of men, all sorts and conditions of women, all interested in what He says. Why? Because He talks, and talks always, about those questions in which human beings, as such, are interested—God and sin and redemption and heaven and hell! That is why Jesus has such a motley class around Him every day,—because He is interesting them in the central places of their lives. It is going to do us some good—isn't it, to get away with Jesus to those supreme and central questions, that in the long run control all our thinking and all our acting, with respect to the questions that are *not* supreme, but subordinate?

And then there is another quality. Jesus always practised what He preached. Jesus never asked anyone to do anything that He was not Himself actually doing, or willing, when a certain situation arose, to do. That has not been true of many of the teachers of the world. Teachers like Socrates, like Plato, many of the great modern teachers of morality, would be only too willing to declare,—as many of them have

actually declared in their own books,—that their conception of the moral life was so high and noble a thing that it was impossible for them to live according to their own teaching!

That is a remarkable thing about Jesus, isn't it? His teaching about the moral life of men is the highest and the deepest that has ever been offered in the history of the race; and in spite of that fact, it is impossible for anyone in this house tonight to point to a situation recorded in the New Testament where Jesus did not live up to His own standard! Just because that is so remarkable a fact, men and women in all the ages since Jesus lived have insisted upon drawing from that fact a stupendous inference,—that Jesus must have had some peculiar and unique relation to God. But we will come to that later on. All that I want to emphasize here this evening is this:—What a glorious satisfaction there is in sitting at the feet of a teacher who is living out day by day before our eyes, in the pages of the New Testament, the very thing He teaches other men! And that is a satisfaction that we may all have as we look into the eyes of Jesus and listen to the things He says to us!

Now finally, I want to speak to you for a moment about the effectiveness of the teaching of Jesus. Of course, there are some people who go about the world wearing spectacles with smoked glass in them; therefore, the world always seems to them just a little bit darker than it really is; they look around the world and they don't see any great improvement, the world isn't getting on very far or fast; Jesus' teaching hasn't amounted to very much. Let us go on an imaginary

trip this evening,—it won't take us long, and it won't cost us anything. We will go to a typical little New England town,—it has no name nor can it be found on any map.

We are arriving, just going into the town. What is the first thing you see? I suppose the first thing is rows and rows of little homes, just the kind of homes you live in yourselves, perhaps. What is going on there? In spite of all that is said in the newspapers and in spite of all the scandalous stories,—in a remarkably large number of those homes you would find tonight a man who loves his wife purely and faithfully, and you would find these two people conscientiously striving to do the very best for each other that they can do with the resources at their disposal. You would find them deeply and intelligently concerned about the education and the development and the future of their little children. In other words, you would find beauty, purity, honest labor, eager hope, filling the rooms of that little home. I want to say to you that the fact that there are so many homes of that character in America tonight, and scattered all over the world, is due directly to the fact that Jesus stood upon this planet once, and uttered the teaching that we are going to study in these Sunday evenings together!

Still, we are not through with the trip yet. Let us leave those homes and walk along a little way, and we will probably come to a hospital. What is the inspiration of these great American and European and Indian and African hospitals? Why is it that these poor, sick and suffering people are being looked after

tonight all over the world, with all this expensive, loving care, even if they can't afford to pay a penny for it? The inspiration of that work of loving kindness came directly from the teaching of Jesus!

A little further on in the same village you will come probably to a church, pointing its finger to the skies, —a church in which some humble teacher stands from Sunday to Sunday, expressing to his people the very truth that he has found in Christ, and bringing the hand of Jesus, with its gracious touch, near to every life in that community. The teaching of Jesus is the secret and the source of the beauty and of the power and of the service that are to be found in that little New England town; and that is true of thousands of towns all over the world tonight!

Don't you believe the man who says that the teaching of Jesus hasn't counted for much. If you were to take out of American life at this moment everything which has come to have a place in it owing directly to the teaching of Jesus,—what do you suppose you would have left? Nothing that would be worth your while to keep,—nothing! We owe all that is good in our national life directly to the teaching of Jesus! You may say there is one thing that the teaching of Jesus hasn't done very much to destroy and abolish from the children of men, and that is the hideous institution which we call War.

That, of course, is a large question and I will only permit myself at this moment to say this about it. Men talk of this and that and the other way of stopping war; some of them are writing essays and entering competitions and striving for prizes, with all their

wonderful proposals as to how in the world war is to be stopped. I am not going to win any prize and I am not going to try any competition; but I am going to give you now the true answer to that question, and it is this:—When the souls and the minds and the imaginations of men and women everywhere are impregnated and taken captive by the teaching of the Son of God, then we will beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks, and we shall learn the art of war no more! That is the real and the only true answer, and that is what we are engaged in here these Sunday evenings. We are going to try to impregnate our own minds and consciences and imaginations with the teaching of Jesus; and to that extent we shall play our part in abolishing and destroying from our midst and from the world, this hateful thing that we call war, which still stalks across the earth in so many baleful, hideous forms!

What Jesus Taught Concerning God



IF you were to make a study,—as I dare say some of you have made a study,—of the history of human thought, you would discover that that history consists very largely of the attempts made by thoughtful men to arrive at the truth concerning God. If you were to go away back, for example, and study some of the books written by the ancient Greeks, you would discover that what they were doing was striving to discover the truth about God; and if you were to make a study of the books written in our own lifetime by some of the great philosophical thinkers of this country, you would find that what those thinkers are still trying to do is to arrive at the truth concerning God. Men have felt in all lands and in all ages, that there is nothing in our life that is more important than that we should find out the truth about God. Everything else in our life seems to depend on what we believe about God; therefore, it would seem to be unspeakably important that our beliefs about God should be as true as we can possibly make them.

This evening we are going to ask what it is that Jesus teaches about God and I am going to answer that question in the words of Jesus Himself; because it is at His feet that we wish in these meetings to sit and it is to His voice that we desire to listen. So I am going to pick out tonight, from the recorded teaching

of Jesus, three of the most wonderful and helpful things that Jesus said about God; and I want to say that if there are those here, young people perhaps, who find some things that will be said, difficult to understand, you hold on to these three great words of Jesus and carry them away with you in your minds and in your hearts and think them over during the week; and you will find that you will get far more good out of them than you could ever get out of me or any other man who could come and stand and speak on this platform.

The first word is this: "*God is a spirit.*" Ever since Jesus uttered those words, men have felt that they constitute one of the greatest of the messages of Jesus. What do they mean? When Jesus said that God is a spirit, He meant, first of all, that God is a personal being. Of course, you know perfectly well that there have been lots of people in the world, and even important religious teachers, who have not believed that God is a personal being; there has been one, at least, of the great religious systems still in existence, exercising an extremely powerful influence in the continent of Asia, which does not believe that God is a person at all. That is one form of the religion of Buddhism. Jesus tells us that God is a person and the more we think about that, the more carefully we examine that, the more clearly does its importance dawn upon our minds.

What is a person? What do we mean by saying that God is a person? That is a very important question. I will also quite frankly admit that it is a very difficult question; but this, at any rate, must be said

in answer to it—that no one is entitled to the name of person who does not possess two things,—first, a mind; and secondly, a will. We call ourselves persons because we possess what we are pleased to call our minds. Perhaps some of us do not possess very powerful minds; we are not among the great intellectual leaders of the world, some of us, perhaps none of us; but at the same time we have a mind. We say we make up our mind, or we change our mind; everybody is familiar with that expression; and we have also a will. We don't need to be very old before people say that we have wills of our own. Perhaps sometimes you have taken somebody into your house to see your baby and the first thing you heard him say was, "The little fellow has a will of his own", probably because he doesn't want to do what you want him to do, or something of that sort. Any sort of creature who has not a mind and a will is not a person; and the higher and better a mind and will you have, the more entitled are you to the name of person. And there was one great thinker once who said that nobody on earth has a complete mind and a complete will; the only person in existence that has a complete mind and will is God, and therefore, He is the only real person, and we are all striving and struggling to be persons like Him.

In other words,—if I may put it into the language of another great thinker, an American thinker,—personality has to be defined in terms of purpose. What is a purpose? A purpose is something that you make up your mind about and which you then exercise your will upon; and when Jesus said that God is a spirit, meaning that God is a person, He taught that God

is a being Who, in His own life, conceives and carries out purposes. That is a tremendous thing to believe about God, but of course that is not enough for us to know. The purposes that God conceives and carries out might be very unwise purposes, or they might even be very cruel purposes. We have known people in history who have conceived and carried out purposes of very great cruelty, also purposes of great unwisdom and foolishness. What if God were a person like that?

And so we pass on to the second great word of Jesus, one of the most wonderful things that Jesus has given to us as a spiritual possession forevermore, and one of those statements which have affected the whole history of human thinking and of human behavior since Jesus first uttered it in Judea:—“*Your Father in heaven is perfect.*” That is one of the great utterances of the New Testament; that is one of the greatest utterances in the history of religion. “Your Father in heaven is perfect.” First of all, this God Who is a person is *our father*. What does that mean? First, I think it means to say that we owe our very existence to that God Who is a person. He determined that He would create us and it is through His power and His wisdom that we are here at all. It is He that made us and not we ourselves.

But that is not all it means, because Jesus wouldn't have used the word “Father” if that was all He meant to convey. When Jesus calls God the Father who is in heaven, He means us to think of God as one Who is deeply interested in the creatures that He has made, just as the fathers in this building tonight are very deeply interested in their children at home. What

would you think of a father who would be prepared to say to you, "Oh yes, those are my children, but I am not interested in them?" What a dreadful thing that would be for a father to say! When Jesus tells us that this great divine person is our Father in heaven, He means by that that God is deeply and permanently interested in the children whom He Himself has made. What a precious and wonderful thing it is for us here tonight to be able to believe that God, the creator and ruler of the universe, is interested in us, interested in each of us, that in one single word, God *loves* His children! That is what is meant by calling God our Father; but that is not all that Jesus says in that remarkable utterance of His.

He says that our Father who is in heaven is *perfect*. It seems to me that what He meant when he said that, was this: That the purpose which God had when He created you and me, was a purpose of absolute wisdom, as well as of absolute goodness. This purpose of God is not yet completed. . God is still working out his purpose for you and for me and what a wonderful thing it is for us to believe,—as we may believe if we are followers of Jesus,—that God is working out in our lives day by day for us a purpose that is absolutely wise and absolutely good; that God never makes any mistakes; and that God never does any evil to his children! What a rich and wonderful little utterance it is, isn't it? "Your father in heaven is perfect." How it binds us up with God and makes us feel safe and comfortable in the embrace of those almighty and most holy arms!

There is one more word that I want to refer to tonight. It is this: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? Yet one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father.*" I have kept that till the last because I believe it to be the best. This life of ours is all the time full of mystery; and from time to time there comes into our human life some great sorrow or some great pain or some great trial, and when that hour and that experience come to us, we are all of us tempted to think that God our Father has forgotten us, or else that it is not true to say that God is our Father at all.

Now, in this golden word of Jesus which I have quoted to you tonight, He deliberately attempts to make us believe that the love and the care of God is absolutely omnipresent, if you will allow me to use such a word as that. You can not go into any corner of the earth where you will not find the care of God waiting for you. You can not go into any sort of experience, no matter how grim and bleak it may appear to be, in which God's care is not waiting for you. As we heard from the choir this very evening: "His tender mercies are over all His works." Think of that poor little sparrow, practically valueless, falling to the ground, nobody paying any attention to it, *save God*, and His hand is almighty and controls the sparrow's fall. And just as God controls the fall of the sparrow, just as that little sparrow has its place in the providential purpose of the living Father, so also have your sorrows and your trials and your pains and your tribulations. God is over-ruling and controlling every one of them and He is over-ruling and controlling them

for your good! That is what Jesus teaches, that is what Jesus means when He declares that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father.

Isn't it a glorious thing to be able to go back into the world tomorrow morning feeling such arms around us,—knowing that such a heart beats for us in the central places of the life of God,—that we are dear to Him and that there is not a thing in our life, no matter how small it may be, that is not of interest and concern to our Father who is in heaven? I submit that in those three statements of Jesus we have the greatest and the best thing that He ever taught about God; and I want you, as I said at the beginning, to think them over as you go from this theatre tonight; talk them over as you go to your homes this evening and tomorrow; and just see what a precious inheritance Jesus has given us in making it possible for us to believe these things about God!

If we have a father like that,—so great, so good, so near in His grace,—what sort of sons and daughters do you think we ought to be? Don't you think we ought to try to be as good to God as we can? Don't you think that we ought in all that we do to try to show forth our love and our gratitude to Him for being so good to us? And our study of God's nature and character here tonight will not have been in vain if there would be one son or one daughter who will go out of this place in a moment or two and walk along the streets saying, "I will be a better son, I will be a better daughter, of the glorious Father, from tonight till the end of my life!"

What Jesus Taught Concerning Himself

IN every age since Jesus lived on this earth, there have been multitudes of men and of women who have believed and declared very extraordinary things about Him. And today, scattered all over the face of the world, in every land that you can mention, there is a great company of men and women of all trades and professions, of all ranks in society, serving under all sorts of flags and all sorts of governments, who regard and worship Jesus as divine. So wonderful a conception of a person who once lived as a man on this world of our own, is something which requires an explanation.

If any person in this building tonight were to say of himself or of any friend of his, or of any other figure in the history of the world, that he was divine—in the sense in which that word has always been used by the Christian church, of Jesus—that person's friends would instantly believe that he had taken leave of his senses. Why, then, should so many intelligent men and women believe about Jesus what every one of them would refuse to believe about any other human person that has ever lived? My answer to that extremely important question is, that the explanation of this impressive fact is to be found in the teaching of Jesus, and especially in what Jesus taught about Himself. For those who seriously desire to know what Jesus taught about Himself, what claims Jesus made upon His own behalf, there is in my opinion no passage in

the whole of the New Testament which is more important than that wonderful passage which begins with words that are familiar to everybody: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you read the whole of that right to the end of the chapter, you find that Jesus is taking up a position of supreme authority and power, declaring that no man but Himself can give to men, what men most deeply need and yearn for; claiming that He, however, can give it to them, and that in royal and unfailing abundance.

And if you cast your eye back in that same chapter a few verses, you will come upon one of the most remarkable utterances that ever fell from the lips of Jesus. At first sight, it doesn't appeal to us so deeply as that gracious invitation I have just quoted; and yet, when you study it carefully, you find that it is bound up with that invitation and that it gives to the invitation with which the chapter closes, all the precious meaning that it contains for us; and this is the passage which I am referring to: "No man knoweth the Father but the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him." What an extraordinary statement that is!

In the first place, let me say about that statement, that here Jesus quite deliberately and very plainly claims for Himself a complete knowledge of God. We have to note the fact that no other person who ever lived on earth, so far as we know, has ever made that claim upon his own behalf. None of the great prophets ever made that claim; no founder of any religion save our own ever made that claim; none of the great phil-

osophers or scientists ever made that claim. Why, some of you will remember that last Sunday evening, in this very place, it was pointed out that if you studied the whole history of human thought, you would discover that it consists very largely of an attempt on the part of thoughtful people everywhere, to know the truth about God. The strange thing about Jesus is, that He claims to have possessed that for which all other men toil and labor without ceasing—a complete knowledge of God!

Just think what a blasphemous thing it would be for me or for you to claim that our knowledge of God was complete. Why, you do not have even a complete knowledge of your next-door neighbor; no, you do not have a complete knowledge even of your own child, or of whatever person it is that lives nearest to you in the circle of love in the home. Our knowledge is so fragmentary; we secure it piece by piece, and day by day and year by year we patiently strive to build the pieces up into a beautiful temple of truth. Jesus claims to possess a *complete* knowledge of God!

Let me ask you now to consider for a moment what that really involves, with regard to the moral life of Jesus. There was a principle which Jesus was very fond of expounding to His disciples when He lived in the world with them, and it was a principle which all true thinkers have come to see as one of extreme importance in all our moral strivings, and it was this: That our knowledge of God grows and increases only insofar as we from day to day obey the law of God; the only avenue to knowledge of God is obedience to His will. Now then, if that principle is sound—and I

think that not one man or woman here will question the statement—and if Jesus claimed to possess an absolute and complete knowledge of God,—the necessary inference is that He claimed also to be in His moral life absolutely and completely obedient to the will of God; because, only with an absolute obedience would an absolute knowledge be possible.

Therefore, in this extraordinary statement of Jesus which I have quoted to you tonight, we find Him explicitly claiming a perfect knowledge of the divine Being, claiming also, by a necessary implication, absolute obedience to the will of God in His moral life; in other words, claiming moral perfection! Now, it is one thing for a human being to set up claims for himself; it is quite another thing for his neighbors and his friends and especially for his enemies, to admit the validity of those claims. Suppose, for example, that some man in this theatre tonight were publicly to claim tomorrow, in the newspapers, that he was the best man in the city. How many people do you suppose would agree with you? Do you suppose that your own wife would agree with you? Well, I hope she would; but still she would probably regard you as rather silly in making such a claim as that. But I can't believe that your business friends would agree with you; they would say among themselves, "Why, I know ten men better than that fellow." You couldn't get away with it. And as for your enemies, in the paper next day they would have all sorts of letters telling all sorts of failures and shortcomings that they had detected in your life for the last twenty years. They would explode your claim in two or three days;

you know it, and so you don't make any such statement.

What about this claim of Jesus? The truth about this claim of Jesus is that, as He walked about among His friends and among His foes, there was to be found no man capable of laying his finger on any corner in the life of Jesus and saying, "Here thou hast failed. Here thy claim of moral beauty and perfection breaks down." Not only has the life of Jesus been put to the test, the severe test, of the observation and the criticism of those of His own time and place, but the life of Jesus has been put to the test of history; because I want to say, and I am sure you believe it is true,—that no human life ever lived on this planet has been so minutely examined under the microscope by every sort of historian and philosopher, as the life of Jesus. And what is the verdict? In the Nineteenth Century one of the deepest and most conscientious philosophic thinkers in England was John Stuart Mill. Mill did not believe in Jesus in the sense in which most of you and in which I believe in Him. He did not believe that Jesus was the bearer to this world of a divine revelation which could never be surpassed. Mill did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, in the sense in which we believe Him to be the Son of God. But Mill, having examined with the eyes of an historian and a scientist and a philosopher, the life of Jesus, said that it would be impossible to set up any higher moral standard for any man's life than that that man should so live that Christ would approve his life! That means to say that if Mill was not prepared to say all that some of us would say about Jesus, at any

rate, he did believe, he was forced by the evidence to believe, that Jesus' was the purest and the most lovely human life of which history has any record!

In other words, the claim that Jesus made for Himself of moral beauty and perfection, has been corroborated by almost the unanimous testimony of thoughtful men and women everywhere. No man can find a flaw in the moral character of Jesus. Now then, if we, by putting to the test that part of His claim which is capable of being put to such a test, discover that claim to be true, are we not compelled, as thoughtful and honest people, to draw the necessary inference, namely, that if the moral life of Jesus was perfect in its beauty, He must have been talking nothing less than the sober, simple truth when He declared that He possessed a perfect knowledge of God!

If we accept this statement of Jesus with respect to Himself,—that His knowledge of God is complete,—what bearing has that upon our meetings here on Sunday nights? Simply this: That the voice of Jesus comes to us with an assurance and an authority never before possessed by any voice that was ever heard in the world. No wonder that we are reverent and patient as we seek to learn, at the feet of this supreme, incomparable teacher, the things He tells us about God and about men and about destiny!

There are two more things which I will say tonight very briefly, because we shall have to take them up later. Out of the moral perfection of Jesus, there arises His claim to be also our Saviour. From those forces within us and around us which mar our own moral beauty and perfection, those things that keep

us from the heights where Jesus trod, He claims to be able to deliver us. "I am come to seek and to save the lost." "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." Jesus yearns to be the Saviour of us all and to bring into our lives, no matter who we are, no matter what our earthly lot may be,—that beauty that was in Him and which has won the heart of the world!

And this also—there is nothing,—and I say these words very deliberately,—there is nothing in the recorded teaching of Jesus which is more emphatically declared over and over again, sometimes in language of imagery, sometimes in the language of plain and simple prose, than that He will one day come to be our Judge! Our lives are to be set up against His perfect life; His beauty is to be the standard of our judgment. That is a very solemn truth to me, because I feel from day to day that I can deceive lots of people with regard to the real meaning and value and quality of my life, but it is impossible to deceive Jesus. There is no judge in the world that has never been deceived by evidence laid before him in a court of justice; but when Jesus stands before us as our Judge, He knows—there is no deceiving of the mind of Christ—and on His part there can be no erroneous judgment.

Let us carry this away with us tonight—we *may* have Jesus for our Saviour; we *must* have Jesus for our Judge! Let us think these things over; let us go back over the history of the world since Jesus lived and died and rose again, and let us see how His claim

has been more and more completely corroborated with every new age and generation; and then let us ask ourselves whether we are not prepared this very night to bow upon our knees before His blessed face and say to Him, in the words of one of the church's oldest and noblest songs:

“Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ;
Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!”

What Jesus Taught Concerning Sin



NOBODY can read the New Testament without discovering not only that Jesus had a great deal to say about sin, but also that He thought of Himself as standing in a very remarkable relation to the sin of the world. Most of the people in this building tonight will remember that, before Jesus was born, a remarkable statement was made concerning him and it was this: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins." "Jesus" means "Saviour". When we begin to study the gospel story with a view to learning, for ourselves, what Jesus taught on this subject of sin, we are surprised perhaps a little to discover that Jesus nowhere said anything about a subject that has been of great interest to thoughtful men and women throughout the history of the Christian religion, namely, this: What is the origin of sin? Where did sin come from? How did sin arise in a world that was made by a good God?

A great many large and difficult volumes have been written on that subject; a great many scholarly people have spent years in thinking about it and in speaking about it and in writing about it; but in the New Testament you will not find one word that was ever said by Jesus on that subject. Apparently, it was a question which had no interest for Him and which He regarded as being of very little importance to us,

because if He had thought of it as being important, He would no doubt have said something about it. The important thing in the mind of Jesus was, not how sin came to exist, but the fact that sin does actually exist. It was with this horrible reality of evil that Jesus concerned Himself and it was from the dominion of this horrible reality that He gave His life to deliver the children of men.

The first thing with regard to this fact of sin that I would like to say in our study of the teaching of Jesus tonight, is this—that according to the thought of Jesus, sin is absolutely universal among men and women. If you would like me to prove that Jesus believed that, I think the very easiest way to satisfy you is to refer to the Lord's Prayer, in the very heart of which you find this petition:—"Forgive us our trespasses." That was a prayer which was given by Jesus to His friends and which I believe He meant *His* friends to hand on to *their* friends through the generations that were yet to come; so that we ourselves tonight, and all other lovers of the name of Jesus throughout the world, are familiar with that prayer and constantly use it, reminding ourselves every time we bow our heads and say those sacred words, that Jesus believed that it was necessary for all men to use such a petition; because sin was a real fact and a real force in the life of every one of them.

There is no man, there is no woman anywhere who is wholly free from the presence and from the power of sin! Sometimes we imagine that that is rather an extreme way of putting it and we are tempted to say within ourselves, "Well, I think I

know some men and women in whose lives there appears to be no sin of any kind at all". Let us bring our own lives and the lives of all men everywhere to the test of the standard of Jesus Himself tonight, and that standard is this: "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Jesus conceives as being in some measure under the power of sin every life which is not yet wholly what God would have it to be. Where is the man in this audience this evening who would be prepared to say that he is already perfect? Where is the man to be found, the sane and thoughtful man, who would be willing to come forward onto this platform or any other platform and declare, "Since such and such a day I have lived a perfect life?" No such man is to be found.

I wonder if everybody in this theatre has heard of a little book which was written a great many years ago, called by the name of "The Shorter Catechism?" Oh yes, I know some of you have heard of it and some of you don't want to hear any more about it, because many of us, when we were younger than we are today, had to learn the Shorter Catechism in the Sunday School and in the day school, too. But I defy any man to stand up today and say he did harm to himself by it. One of the questions in the Shorter Catechism is—"What is sin?" And here is the answer: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God."

Suppose we take that old-fashioned answer, which I may say here is wholly according to the mind of Jesus, and apply that to our own lives just as we are living them now. "Any want of conformity to, or

transgression of, the law of God." There are, of course, many people who do not go about spending their time and their strength deliberately breaking the law of God. There are comparatively few people in any community who do that; nevertheless, most of us find ourselves occasionally, when the temptation is very strong, breaking *some* of the laws of God. But whether we deliberately break His laws or not, surely it is true that there is not one of us here this evening who is not daily coming short of a complete conformity to that most holy law.

Do you ever go to bed at night patting yourself on the back (if I may use such an expression) on account of the fact that during the day that is then closing, you have lived your life fully, absolutely, up to the very limit of God's highest and most exacting requirement for you? I should think, on the contrary, that most of us when we retire to rest, trouble ourselves oftentimes over the fact that we have lost this or that opportunity of doing good; that here or there we have indeed failed to live up to the stature of Christian manhood or of Christian womanhood. We may not be able to recall a single hour of the day in which we have deliberately said to God, "I will not do this thing that thou requirest of me" and yet we find it impossible to say that we have indeed lived completely as His children. That is what Jesus set before us as the real standard of our life. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect", and anything that is short of that brings us into the category of sinners and makes us confess

humbly before His throne tonight that we have indeed, all of us, sinned!

At the same time, while Jesus believed and stated repeatedly, directly or indirectly, that all the men and women round about Him were sinful, He did not say that all men and women were *equally* sinful. On the contrary, He made it very plain that in His mind some sins were far worse than others; and the strange thing about the mind of Jesus on this subject is, that the sins which He most violently condemned were not the sins which we, as a rule, are inclined most violently to condemn. In fact, Jesus divided sinners into two great groups; and the first of these groups contained those whom He described by the general expression of "publicans and sinners." Who were these publicans and sinners? These were men and women who had by degrees given themselves over at last wholly to evil ways,—thieves, liars, adulterers, men and women of all kinds of unclean ways of life; and it is a notorious fact that Jesus spent much of His time on earth in the company of people like that. So much indeed was this the case, that from time to time people used to come to the disciples of Jesus and say to them, "Does your Master know what sort of people those are He is going about with? These are the worst people in the town and if He doesn't take care, He will become contaminated and like them in the end." And when Jesus heard those stories He used to say, no doubt with a gracious smile upon His face, "I am come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. To live among these people is the very purpose for which I came into the world;" because

Jesus saw at the very centre of the most rotten life on earth, some gleam that had not yet been extinguished, and He was sure that if only He could get down to the depths of that poor, poisoned life and lay His gracious hand upon that still wholesome place, He could bring that life right back and up and out, until at last that creature that seemed to be utterly lost and hopeless might become, not in name only but in deed and in truth, a child of the living Father! Jesus lived among these men because He was seeking their souls; He was yearning for their salvation. That is what He came for. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

We have no right ever to despair of any man or of any woman, no matter how bad and hopeless looking the case may be; for Jesus never despaired of anybody. There is something in the worst of men that can still respond to the voice and to the touch of God! That is the teaching of Jesus.

There was another class of sinners, and they were called the Pharisees and they were sinners of a very different order. They didn't go about publicly sinning, as these other poor creatures did; they were not regarded, as these other people were regarded, as the off-scourings of society. The Pharisees, many of them, held the most important positions, the most conspicuous stations, both in the city and in the synagogue; men who were looked up to by their fellow citizens as leaders of thought, leaders of policy, leaders in commerce, leaders in every good word and work. And yet Jesus took with those Pharisees just the very reverse course from that which He took with the other

group, and He tore their outside veils and coverings off them, and He revealed, behind all their camouflage of religion, a life which at the very heart and centre of it was unwholesome and corrupt! Jesus told those Pharisees very plainly to their faces on more than one occasion that, while they garbed themselves in the robes and the cloaks of religion, inside there was nothing to be found but pride and selfishness and cruelty and self-righteousness,—the things which, in the mind of Jesus, were the worst things in the world! So strongly did Jesus believe that to be true, that He once said to a group of Pharisees these most terrible words:—"The harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before you!"

Just think of that—church people, church members, officers in the church of that time—and Jesus said to them, "Do you see those poor, miserable, poisonous off-scourings moving about our streets and byways? Well, they are nearer the kingdom of God than you are!" That is a very significant fact. It is as if the Son of God would say to all of us, "If you want to be a sinner, *be* a sinner; if you want to be a selfish man, *be* a selfish man. Come out into the open places with your name upon your brow, so that all men will know what you are and what you strive to do. But the greatest enemy of goodness in the world, the greatest enemy of God, is the man who is unclean and who is selfish and who is proud in his heart, and who professes outside to be a leader, in the realms of morals and religion." That is why Jesus spoke to the Pharisees of His day in language which is unparalleled in

His own recorded utterances, and I think unparalleled anywhere else, in its fearful severity.

If there is a publican or a harlot listening to me tonight, I want to say to you that Jesus Christ, by His love and by His holy purity, is able to give you back your purity and your self-respect and to set you again amongst clean and decent people in this community. But if there is a Pharisee here tonight, then I want to tell you that it is going to be a very difficult thing for you ever to get into the kingdom of God; because, in order to get even to the gate of the kingdom, you will have to strip yourself of all your pretense and you will have to allow God to take all that pride and all that selfishness and all that self-righteousness out of your soul! There is no room for that sort of thing in the streets of the heavenly kingdom!

Those were the two great classes of evil in the time of Jesus; those are the two great classes of evil in any age,—the evil that goes about openly and makes no pretense of being anything else; and the evil which goes about masquerading as piety. We had in one of our songs tonight that wonderful parable of the Pharisee and the publican. That poor publican didn't say very much to God, did he? He just said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." As I heard those words sung to us this evening I thought to myself that nothing in the world would do us more good than that everyone of us should bow our heads and bow our hearts before God tonight and say just those very same words. Let us get rid, in this quiet hour, of all pretense, of all hypocrisy, of all unreality; and

let us confess to God what we know in our souls to be true,—that we are all of us sinful men or sinful women; that there is none of us perfect yet. Let us cast ourselves upon the divine mercy, that we may be pardoned, and upon the divine grace, that we may be made strong. That is the teaching of Jesus.

Let me sum the whole thing up in this one single sentence. Sin has its seat in the heart, but sometimes it comes out of the heart in manifest forms of evil, while at other times it remains in the heart doing its destructive and corroding work,—and this latter is the more dangerous of the two for the individual soul, according to the mind of Christ. What you and I have to do is to have these hearts of ours cleansed; we have got to have the springs of our life made sweet and clean, so that we may be like those good trees of which Jesus speaks in the passage that we read tonight, from which there grows nothing but good and wholesome and luscious fruit! That we shall have to study next Sunday evening. We couldn't leave the matter here. Having studied what Jesus has to say about sin, next Sunday we shall study what Jesus said about the ways and the means through which we are to be delivered from its hateful power!

What Jesus Taught Concerning Salvation



WE have arrived at what I think everybody regards as the very soul and centre of the teaching of Jesus. We have noticed more than once that Jesus regarded Himself, and has always been regarded by the church, as the Saviour of men. The whole life of Jesus was somehow bound up with this matter of salvation; and if you were to take out of the gospel story, and out of the rest of the New Testament, every reference that there is to salvation, whether under that name or under some similar name,—everything relating to forgiveness, everything relating to reconciliation, everything relating to men being at peace with God, everything that relates to the new life that we may find in the fellowship of God,—if you were to take all that out of the New Testament, how much do you suppose would be left? That would be an excellent exercise for some of us some Sunday evening; or some other evening when we have an hour or two to spare,—just simply read through the New Testament and cut out everything in it that relates to the salvation of the lives of men. I believe you would be surprised to discover what a poor, little page or two you would have left when you had finished. Christianity is a religion of salvation. It is, of course, a very bold and daring thing to try to discuss this great subject in one short evening; and yet there are some things that we sim-

ply must say about it, even if we can't say all that should be said.

If somebody were to ask you what, in your judgment, is the controlling idea of all the recorded teaching of Jesus, what would you say? I would say, the fatherhood of God. And of course, when we speak of the fatherhood of God, we instantly think of ourselves as God's children; because the idea of God being a father is devoid of meaning unless we are His children, and this great double thought runs through all the teaching of Jesus in a way which completely controls that teaching. It is in relation to that great double idea that we are to set tonight this other idea of salvation.

Last Sunday evening we discovered that, according to the mind of Jesus, there is no man in the world who is not a sinner; and by that I mean to say that there is not a single child of the heavenly Father who is really treating his Father properly. There is not one of us behaving as we ought to behave, when we remember that we are sons and daughters of the living God. And when Jesus stood in the world among those sinful people that were round about Him, He saw how badly and how thoughtlessly they were treating God,—some of them in ignorance and some of them in deliberate and persistent sin. And He saw those men and women restored to the Father's friendship and to the precious service of the Father's home; and the difference between the one state and the other is the meaning of salvation. And if you want to see the whole thing put into one perfect picture, all you have to do is to read over that familiar story in the

fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel, the story of the Prodigal Son. When that son went back from the swine-troughs to his father's beautiful house, that was salvation.

Now then, let us be perfectly definite and perhaps a little personal this evening in connection with this serious matter. Here in this room at this moment there is a man who is not treating his heavenly Father properly; and by his ill treatment of his Father he has divorced himself for the time being from his Father's home. Let us begin to watch that man, taking his homeward journey tonight. What a blessed thing it would be if he would take this journey! In order to help him back home, if I can, I am going to tell him the steps by which his salvation will be made a real perfect and beautiful thing; and the first step,—not according to my way of thinking, but according to Jesus Christ's—is repentance. There can be no salvation for the man who does not repent. What is repentance? Sometimes we are told that repentance is sorrow—sorrow for sin; but there is a great deal of sorrow for sin that is not repentance. You are sorry perhaps, some of you, for some sin you committed ten or fifteen or twenty years ago; but the meaning of that sorrow is, that you feel that, if you hadn't committed that sin, you might be a richer or a happier man tonight than you are; and in all your sorrow there may be no thought of God.

But the sorrow that makes repentance is the sorrow which comes to a man's soul when he realizes that he has offered to God, as a service, as a reward for His great measureless love in Christ Jesus, nothing but

thoughtlessness, nothing but disobedience, nothing but shameful and deliberate sinfulness. Many and many a time that thought has gripped a man's mind and a man's conscience, sometimes as he has walked along the street, and sometimes as he has played and smiled with his friends,—the thought comes over him, "What a mess I have made of my life as a child of God! What business have I to offer a life like this to my heavenly Father?" And when that man's whole soul is filled with shame and sorrow for the way in which he has treated his Father in heaven, he is not far from salvation!

Just think. Have you been treating God the way you ought to treat Him? Have you been the sort of son that you ought to have been in relation to this Father Who is in heaven? If not, what are you going to do about it? Do you feel any of this shame and sorrow tonight in your heart? Because, if you don't, I am afraid there is little to be said to you; but if you do, then come you right back to God with nothing in your mind at all but just this shame and sorrow. That is all that God asks you to bring, and you are to bow before His face and say to Him, "Oh, my Father, I am sorry. That is all I can say. I am sorry. I am filled with shame and bitter pain at the way in which I have treated Thee." And the teaching of Jesus is this—that the moment that man comes back to God with that sorrow in his heart and those words upon his lips, God forgives and restores him!

Don't you remember the parable? Why, before that son had half the story of his shame and sorrow out of his mouth, the father had stopped him and told

his servants to bring the robe and the ring and the shoes, and to kill the fatted calf and to make merry in the home, because this beloved son had come back. There is that sort of a welcome waiting for the sinful man in this meeting tonight, just so soon as, with shame and sorrow in his soul, he comes back to God! That is the second element in salvation—restoration—restoration to the sense of God's precious smile; restoration to the sense that God is no longer against us, as He always is against sin in every form; but that God is on our side, that we are once more children in the Father's home! That is what I mean by restoration, and we can be assured that, once this evil of the past is forgiven, it is absolutely and utterly blotted out from the very memory of the Father.

Did you ever think of it? God is the only father in the universe who can forget when He forgives! No other father can do that. There may be a father here tonight whose son sometime in the distant past treated him badly, treated him with callous indifference, or perhaps even with deliberate cruelty; and long, long since, the whole thing has been forgiven and you and your son are on the best possible terms today. But have you forgotten? I don't believe you have; I don't believe you can forget. It sticks there,—the memory of those hateful days when you and your son were at bitter enmity, because of the way he treated you, his father. But God, when He forgives us, forgets as well, and never again will He bring up those evil things of the past, but He has blotted them out forever!

Just before we pass on from that, let us stay a moment. It is all very well to say that God forgives and forgets; but what about those people on the earth who have been the objects of my sinful behavior? We have done our injuries to God through our fellow creatures. Men and women have been the victims of our sin; and if God is willing to forgive and able to forget, what about these men and women living near us in the world? We have done them grievous injury. What about it? There is this about it—that Jesus teaches, just as plainly as He teaches anything, that repentance is always bound up with restitution, where restitution is possible.

I wonder if it wouldn't be a good thing for some of us to make this Christmas season a very blessed time for ourselves and for our neighbors, by making restitution. Is there someone in this city that you have wronged? Is there someone in this city that you are wronging daily? Is there someone in this city who is at enmity with you because of your evil treatment of him? Wouldn't it be a very great and blessed thing if you would go to that man before Christmas,—walk into his office or into his house, and tell him that you have come to make restitution? Or if the wrong you did that man was of such a kind that you cannot make restitution, then you go to that man just the same and ask him to forgive you. Tell him, just as you tell God, that you are sorry for what you have done; and I believe that if you do that, that man will spring off his chair and hold out his hand to you, and your enmity will be forgotten and you will be better friends than ever, beginning with this very

week before Christmas! That would be a splendid thing if somebody would do that after we leave this service tonight.

But I have a word, just one word, for the man that has been wronged. When we receive injuries from other people, we sometimes make it very hard for them to come and ask to be forgiven; we just make ourselves as cold as we can; and when we see this fellow coming along the street towards us, we cross the street so that we won't have to meet him or speak to him. We will make no approach; we will make it as hard as we can for him to admit that he is wrong and ask to be forgiven. That is not the way God does with us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. God in Christ Jesus came and begged of us to be reconciled with Himself; and wouldn't it be a good thing if some of those of you who have suffered injury from your neighbor, were to take the initiative in this matter? Instead of waiting for that sinful man to come to *your* house, you go to *his* house and ask him whether this trouble that is between you can not be blotted out, the way that God blots out our sins from the book of His remembrance? Take that man by the hand and say, "I am willing to forgive you if you are willing to be a friend of mine again. Let us blot it all out and let us live as children of the blessed Father ought to live;" so that I, who have done the wrong will try to make restitution to you, and you to whom the wrong has been done, will come half way, or more than half way, to meet me and will make the matter of restitution easier and more precious all round,—just the way that Jesus makes this

whole matter of repentance and forgiveness so much easier, by coming *the whole way* to meet us.

That isn't all. I have yet to say the two best things in connection with this matter of salvation, and the first is this:—When you get back into the holy fellowship of your Father in heaven, and feel that these clouds are blotted out from between you,—you will find in that restored fellowship a pledge and a promise of the most wonderful thing possible to men, namely, absolute victory over evil! It is a humiliating truth, that even those in this building tonight who have lived the Christian life the longest and the deepest, are constantly doing things outwardly and inwardly which are vexing our heavenly Father. Not the best man among us is a perfect man yet; but the teaching of Jesus is, that we are going to be perfect some day through the fellowship and the love of God; and what a wonderful gospel that is! Some day, out of these lives of ours, out of the life of every man who will come penitently to God to be forgiven, every vestige, every root of sin, is to be torn and thrown away, and we are going to be like Jesus; and when all sin has been taken away and when our lives are like the life of Jesus, that is salvation! Some of us, many of us, I hope, are being saved now through this love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord; but none of us is wholly saved. Sin is still there and some day we are going to be saved utterly, because He is able to save to the uttermost!

And the other thing that I want to say is this:—That when we find in the love of God our salvation from sin, we are going to find in that same love our

salvation from some other things as well. When I come so close to the loving heart of God as to see in my own experience that He so loves my life that He is willing to go any length that it may be redeemed,—even the length of manifesting Himself to me in the life and in the death of Jesus Christ His Son,—then I am going to draw this inference,—that no evil thing can ever come to my life from the hand of God! And from that moment I am saved from all fear and I am saved from all fretting; and no matter what happens round about me, no matter what the pains and the sorrows and the disappointments of life may be, I now know that the biggest thing, the central thing, in all the universe, is that divine love which received me back after I had sinned so long and so deliberately against it; and with that love I feel that I am saved utterly.

That is the secret of what, in the New Testament, is called the “peace of God which passes understanding.” The man who knows the power of God’s love is a man from whose soul all fear and all misgiving and all doubts about the providential order, are banished forevermore! That is the sort of salvation that we covet for every man here who hasn’t got it tonight; and we may have it, we may begin to have it now, if only we will take the first step,—and the first step, as I said in the beginning, is to come just as we are to the heavenly Father’s feet and say to Him, “Oh God, Thou God and Father of Jesus Christ, my Lord, I am sorry!” Then, as Jesus Himself put it, there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God.

What Jesus Taught Concerning the Meaning of Greatness



PERHAPS there is no word that enters more frequently into our common conversation than the word "great". Just you listen tomorrow in talking with your friends, and, if you can, count the number of times that you hear this word "great" in the course of the day. We talk about a great speech, or a great game, or a great joke, or a great gift, or a great man. I suppose it is not really unfair to suggest that we use that word very often without thinking of what it means, or of what it ought to mean, just as the great majority of us use lots of words without thinking of their true significance. But suppose that someone were to challenge you tomorrow and suppose he were to stop you right in the middle of your talk, if you had used that word, and should say to you, "What exactly do you mean by 'great'? For example, you spoke a moment ago about a great man. What precisely did you mean?" Suppose he went further than that and said to you, "I would like to know just for the sake of curiosity what man you regard as the greatest man in all the world today?"

Well, you would have to stop and think. I don't suppose anybody would be willing to answer that question off-hand; but this at least is certain, that the answer that you would give to that kind of ques-

tion would depend altogether on the standard by which, in your own mind, greatness among men is measured. It may, for instance, be your opinion that the greatness of a man ought to be measured by his wealth. Then you would try to discover who is the richest man in the world. I think I saw a photograph of him in the paper the other day. And you would draw the inference that he must be the greatest man on earth, because he has more money than any other man, so far as others have given us insight into their private possessions. Or a man's greatness might be measured by the amount of power which he has or which he uses, and you would begin to wonder who is the most powerful man in the world. You might think perhaps of some employer of labor, or of some statesman or monarch, and that would be your answer to the question. You might, however, take a different point of view altogether and you might say, "In my opinion a man's greatness is to be measured wholly by his wisdom." Then you would begin to wonder within yourself who is the wisest man on earth? The deepest thinker? The man who has secured the largest grasp of the truth? And perhaps you might mention the name of some illustrious scientist.

These answers would all be very interesting, but it is much more interesting to learn from the New Testament that that very question was put to Jesus two thousand years ago, and one day, as He stood among His friends, one of them asked Jesus: "Whom do you consider to be the greatest?" In the answer that Jesus gave to that question we find ourselves, as it seems to me, pretty near the very heart of His

teaching, because it is not possible to deny that, in the answer which Jesus gave to that question, He made a contribution to human thought that had never been made before. In other words, the answer to that question, as it fell from the lips of Jesus, contains one of the essential elements of what we regard as a Christian philosophy of life. Now, I am very sorry to say—because I am afraid it may hurt your feelings a little—that, according to the mind of Jesus, all the answers proposed to the question a moment ago, are wrong. According to Jesus a man's wealth has no relation whatsoever to that man's greatness, except this—that Jesus one day did say, in the most explicit fashion, that it is an exceedingly difficult thing for a *rich* man ever to become a *great* man; and according to the mind of Jesus, the power that a man exercises over his fellow creatures, has nothing whatever to do with his greatness. Sometimes great power has been possessed and used by some of the worst men in history,—by the Emperor Nero, for example. You could not imagine Jesus admitting that the Emperor Nero was a great man. And when Jesus discusses this subject of greatness, He doesn't say one word about wisdom, either. The most wonderful scholar in the world, the most famous scientist that ever lived, may turn out to be, or to have been, a man who, in the judgment of Jesus, does not deserve the name of great. If these answers are all wrong, according to Jesus, what is the *right* answer? What is *His* answer?

In the first place, the foundation of all greatness, according to the mind of Jesus, is a man's love to God. If you can point to a man in whose life there is no love

to God, then he may be a great scholar or he may be a great ruler or he may be a great financier,—but it is untrue to say that he is a great man. The kind of character which Jesus regards as great can not be builded up at all, can not even *begin* to be builded up, until there has been laid the foundation of a deep, intelligent, passionate love of God. That is the first thing of all.

Out of that love to God, however, there arises in the life of men a quality upon which Jesus first, among all the teachers of the world, set the stamp and name of greatness and what do you think that quality was? Humility! In the Christian system of virtues, humility is one of the greatest and most shining of all, and the meaning of the place that Jesus gave to this modest virtue, is this: When a man begins to think of the stupendous truth that God loves him, it seems to that man always and inevitably the most wonderful thing in the world, that God—whom it is impossible for us truly even to think of, whose greatness is beyond our imaginations, whose holiness can not be put into our common human language—that that God should call him into His service! What a marvellous thing it is that God should ask me to serve Him! If God wants my service, I don't care how simple or how lowly or how mean the service may seem to be, I will rejoice in the great and glorious privilege of doing it for Him. That is the meaning of humility in the service of our Father who is in heaven. It is so great a privilege to serve Him at all that the very lowliest service that He asks us for, fills our lives with joy and gladness, and we are only too eager to give it.

At the same time, this love to God and this humility in His service, both manifest themselves in our relations with our fellows. You can not love God and hate your brother; and you can not serve God while refusing all the time to serve your brethren; and so this humility in the mind of the man that Jesus would describe as being great, takes the form of willingness to serve the very humblest and the very lowliest of his fellows, in the meanest and the lowliest way.

You see, poor James and John, in that New Testament story, were anxious to serve God in conspicuous ways; they wanted to occupy places which would be so glorious that all men would speak about them, talk about the service they were rendering; realize what wonderful men James and John must be; and as Jesus thought over that situation in their minds, He said to them one day: "Do you know what is wrong with you? What is wrong with you is, that you need to be converted. You need to be turned right around and to look and move in the opposite direction." That is a startling thing, that Jesus should say to men who had lived in His company and His fellowship for years, that they were not yet converted? I dare say that is true of many of us who have lived in the company and fellowship of Jesus for years, members of churches, professing Christian men and women; and yet if we realized our own minds tonight we would have to admit that we have not yet begun to take the point of view of Jesus with regard to the true greatness of life. We measure our lives and our success in terms of money or in terms of power or in terms of something else which is absolutely scorned and rejected by Jesus

as a standard and measure of greatness! What we have to realize is, that there can be no greatness of life for us until, out of a consuming love to God, there rises a passionate love for our fellow men; and until that love to God and men is able and willing to take the form of the lowliest service in the world!


More than that, this humble man of whom the Lord is speaking to us in this study, is one who never looks for any sort of reward save only the boundless joy that he derives from the service itself. That is another remarkable thing. There are lots of men who would be willing to render even lowly and menial services to their fellows, provided they would be paid enough for doing it. But the humble man, the man whose humility is the fruit of a great love, never thinks of pay or of reward, either from his fellow men or from his Father who is in heaven. He loves to serve God and his fellows!

If we take this teaching of Jesus and apply it to our original question, what do you think the result would be? Suppose we were to put the question thus:—Who of all the men in the world today is, according to the standard of Jesus, the greatest man? Of course, we have to confess that that is a question that we have no power and that we have no right to answer. But this I will say,—that if Jesus Christ were to come visibly into our midst now and to give us the true answer to that question, I believe that the name that Jesus would utter would surprise every man and every woman in this building! Because I believe it would be a name that none of us ever heard before. It may be some simple quiet saint in some far-off cottage in

the Middle West prairies, who lives there day by day serving his God and his fellows, with a great love; doing all he can and passionately desiring that he could do more, for the spiritual enrichment and uplifting and upbuilding of other lives. It may be some missionary of the cross of Christ who, having turned his back on home and native land and every sort of social advantage and advancement, has gone down into the islands of the ocean or into the wilds of Asia or of Africa, with no object, no purpose in view, but simply to serve the Lord he loves and to serve the men and women round about him in their darkness.

I do not know, but it is wonderful to think that it is possible for all of us to be great, in Jesus Christ's sense of the term. Most of us can never be great men in the world's sense of the term; we haven't enough money, we haven't enough power, we haven't enough learning, we are deficient in something or another. But if we love God and if out of that love there comes a service, humble yet glowing and passionate, a service of Him and of the people around us,—we shall graduate in Christ's school of greatness, and although our material reward may be nothing or small, we shall have a crown of which no power on earth or out of the earth shall ever be able to rob us!

What Jesus Taught Concerning His Own Death

VERY reader of the New Testament, even the most careless and casual, must have been struck by the fact that there is no other event in the career of Jesus which is described with the fulness of detail which characterizes every one of the four accounts of His crucifixion. From that fact we would be, I think, entitled to infer, even if we did not otherwise know it to be true, that the death of Jesus was a matter of supreme interest and importance to the mind of the early church. What gave its interest and importance to the death of Jesus? How did men come to believe concerning the death of Jesus, the perfectly tremendous things that they did come to believe about it? We have only to open some of the letters of the Apostle Paul, or to linger for a moment among the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, to discover that it was the belief of the early Christian church,—I think I am not wrong when I say the universal belief of that church,—that the death of Jesus had both for God and for men an importance which had never belonged before and which would never belong again to any other event in human history.

Of course, we are, some of us, familiar with the view that all this idea about the saving power of the cross of Jesus, was invented, and that it was invented chiefly by the Apostle Paul. The most serious objection which

can be brought against that view, is that the Apostle Paul himself explicitly states that he did *not* invent the early church's conception of the meaning of the death of Jesus; for we are all of us, or most of us at any rate, familiar with the passage which begins with these words: "I received what I delivered unto you, how Jesus died for our sins"; by which of course he plainly means that this conception of the meaning of the death of Jesus, was something which had been handed on to him by those who had been Christians before him. In other words, even at the stage of Christian history which preceded the conversion of Paul, the Christian church was sure that it was right in interpreting the death of Jesus as it did always interpret it. Whence came the assurance of the church? It seems to me that there is only one reasonable answer to that question and it is this: That the church's idea of the redeeming value of the death of Jesus, and the church's assurance that it was right in entertaining and in propagating that idea, came from Jesus Himself. In other words, Jesus Christ, in the course of His earthly ministry, had introduced His friends to this stupendous conception of the meaning of His own death, with which we are all very familiar, and yet with which none of us is familiar enough.

As a matter of fact, when we read the recorded teaching of Jesus, we learn first of all, that at a comparatively early stage in His ministry He began to speak to His friends about His death; but the way in which He spoke about it had this very startling characteristic,—that He gave His friends to understand that when He came to die, He would not die,

as we say, naturally, but He would die by violent means. In other words, He told His disciples to expect not so much that He would die, as that He would be put to death. It was very difficult for those who loved Jesus to accustom themselves to that declaration or even to accept it as true; and so, very patiently and very insistently Jesus mentioned the grave matter once and again and again; but when the end of His ministry drew near He took them,—if we may use such an expression,—more deeply into His confidence and He tried to show them how this death that He was about to die, was not to be a fate thrust upon Him by wicked men, but the very destiny for the fulfilling of which He had come into the world. Jesus tried to convince His disciples that His death was to be, not only from the point of view of those who would observe it, a tragedy, but also, from His point of view and God's, a willing and determined sacrifice.

There are especially two passages in the recorded utterances of Jesus which bring us very intimately into contact with His mind on this holy subject. The first is closely connected with the experience of Jesus and His disciples which we were studying last Sunday evening. You remember they were discussing once with one another, what was the meaning of greatness and who among them was the greatest; and in the course of that very solemn conversation, Jesus said to His disciples, "Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." You see what the meaning of that statement must have been in the mind of Jesus. I do not mean for one moment to be so presumptuous

as to say that you or I or any Christian man can see quite to the depths and grasp the whole significance of that utterance of Jesus; but I do most emphatically mean to say that there are elements in its meaning which Jesus never intended any of us to miss, and first of all, as I have already hinted, Jesus here explicitly states that He came into the world for the purpose of giving up His life.

In the second place, He teaches that in the giving up of His life, He would deal with the souls of men as some great benefactor might deal with men imprisoned and enslaved, if he should pay the price of their deliverance and set them forever free. "My life", He says, "is to be the ransom. I am to pay the price which will enable men to enter into freedom out of the bondage of their sins." Whatever may be the full and final interpretation of that, it seems to me that Jesus can not have meant less than this when He uttered those unspeakably solemn words.

And the other passage which must be described as essential, or rather, the group of passages, is that group in which Jesus founds what we know now in the Christian church as the Lord's Supper. In the course of that eventful evening, the most eventful in the history of the world, perhaps,—you remember how Jesus took bread and broke it and gave to His disciples and said to them, "Take, eat; this is (in symbol, in picture, in parable), my body, my flesh." And after they had eaten the bread, He took the cup also and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." What does that mean? What did Jesus mean by the new covenant? He was thinking, as it seems to me, of that great

passage in the Book of Jeremiah wherein that mighty prophet had foretold a day when God would come among His people and would establish among them a new covenant, which would take the place of the old covenant of Sinai, the very essence and centre of which covenant would be an undertaking on the part of God to forgive and blot out the sins of all His people. "This", says Jesus, "is my blood of the new covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins." Jesus directly relates His own death to God's forgiveness of the sins of men.

It seems to me that there is no escape from that. We may agree with it, or we may not agree with it. We may regard it as the greatest and the most solemn and the most profound thing ever uttered by the lips of man, or we may regard it as something with which we men of the Twentieth Century have nothing whatever to do; but it stands as a fact. that this and nothing less than this, is what Jesus taught as the meaning and significance of His own death; that by His death forgiveness of sins was to come into the lives of men and that men were to be delivered from the bondage of evil and brought into the glorious liberty of the Sons of God!

Of course, there are some of us who are perfectly willing to accept that as the true interpretation of the cross, simply on the ground that it was taught by Jesus Himself. Others, however, probably would like a little corroboration for so stupendous a conception and that corroboration I am prepared to give you now,—corroboration, namely, from history and from experience. First of all, the man who takes this view

of the meaning of the death of Jesus finds, inevitably and invariably, new tides of moral power flowing into and through his life, and by the side of those moral streams there begin also to flow no less cleansing streams of uttermost hatred for sin in all its forms.

Is there a man here tonight who loves sin and who is playing with it from day to day and who is allowing it to poison the springs of his life? Well then, I don't know much about you, but there is one thing I do know, and that is, that you have never seriously taken the point of view of Jesus with regard to the meaning of His Cross; because if you had, you would hate sin.

It is almost to put the same thing in other words, when I say further that every great historic revival of religion in the history of Christianity, has been associated with the preaching of this interpretation of the cross. Did you ever know of a revival of religion which occurred in association with a preacher who didn't know what to believe about Jesus, or who didn't think there was any particular significance about His death? I do not wish myself to speak scornfully of the beliefs of any man; but I am bound to say that I have never read or heard of such a revival of religion. Sometimes we wonder why there is no great revival in our own day. I believe that before we can have a revival, both preachers and hearers will have to come to believe more deeply and radiantly than many of us at this present moment do, in Christ's interpretation of His own death. That is what I believe.

Once more, did you ever hear of any mighty mission or of any powerful missionary society that was ever born elsewhere than at the cross, as interpreted by Jesus? Do you know anything about the history of religious and missionary societies? I am sure many of you know a great deal about them, and will corroborate me when I say that the passion with which those societies and those individuals went into the ends of the earth to be the instruments of the redemption of our fellows, was a passion which was born in them at the cross of Christ, interpreted as God's unspeakable and immeasurable gift to mankind.

And finally, is it not true that it is at the cross, as interpreted by Jesus, that men have come to believe without the possibility of any subsequent misgiving, in the love of God? Do you think that men would ever have come to believe thus in the love of God, if it hadn't been for the redeeming death of Jesus? If you don't believe in the redeeming death of Jesus now, I want to ask you if you are absolutely sure in your own mind of the love of God; and if you are, I want to ask you, why? Is there any absolute demonstration in history that God Almighty loves men, apart from the awful demonstration of the cross? I am myself not sure that there is. There is a great deal of pious thinking about the love of God, a great deal of able and intellectual speculation concerning it; but absolute assurance I know not where to find, save at the cross of Him Who loves me and gave Himself for me! In other words, history and Christian experience conspire to corroborate the teaching of Jesus about His own death. Do you think that if that interpreta-

tion was altogether false and mistaken, these glorious and triumphant results could have flowed from the men and women and groups, transformed into the likeness of the Son of God, through a passionate and unspeakable gratitude to Jesus for something that He really never did at all? Is that a possible thing to believe?

But if, by the testimony of Jesus supported by the glad and glorious testimony of a thousand thousand saints throughout the world, as well as thousands and thousands more in the heavenly places, we are to accept this view of the death of Jesus as true,—what then? Is there anything that we are *expected* to do or that we are *bound* to do as a result of taking that view of the death of Jesus,—that for my redemption and the redemption of all mankind, He deliberately laid down His life? There is only one thing that any of us can do:

“Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bid’st me come to thee,
O, Lamb of God, I come!”

That’s all.

What Jesus Taught Concerning Prayer



OME of you, I am afraid, are thinking that this is not a very suitable subject for the Sunday evening before Christmas, and if that is what you are thinking, I am very sorry; because I will have to disagree with you. Whatever *we* may think about Christmas, I know, and I suppose some of you know, very much to your cost, what *the children* think about it. A Christmas without any presents would be a poor sort of a Christmas for a child. I have no hesitation in saying that the very best present that it is possible for God to receive, is the simple, humble, believing prayer of a man or a woman or of a child who loves Him. And when we are thinking in these days of the gifts that we are giving to one another and by which we try to express our love or our admiration, let us remember this,—that God, the eternal Father of us all, is constantly expecting gifts from us; and the best gift, far and away the best, that we can ever give Him, is to bow before His holy face and offer our prayers.

Of course, there are some people who don't believe in prayer,—very clever people who tell us that prayer is no use, partly because God is so *good* that He gives us the very best things that He *can* give us, whether we pray or not; and partly because God is so *wise* that it is mere foolishness on our part to tell Him what He ought to do; therefore, prayer is meaningless,

and if it is meaningless, it is of course valueless; therefore, these clever people do not pray any more.

Some years ago, ten years perhaps, I sat in a meeting such as this in a small South African town, and I listened to a sermon preached by one of the greatest Christian men that ever lived in Africa. His name was Andrew Murray, and I am quite sure that that name is familiar to some of you. Andrew Murray at that time was so old and weak that, instead of standing on the platform, he sat on a chair. The text that he chose was this: "Alone, praying." You will remember how we are told in the New Testament that on one occasion Jesus was away in a solitary place, alone, praying; and as long as I live, I shall never forget the sermon that that aged saint preached upon that text, because he told us something of the significance that prayer assumes in the mind of a man who is prepared to study carefully the place that prayer occupied in the life of Jesus.

You will remember that, in one of our earlier studies, we learned that the deepest of all the ideas, the controlling idea in the teaching of Jesus, is that of the fatherhood of God. It would be strange, would it not, if the fatherhood of God should be the deepest truth in the world, while on the other hand, it should prove to be a useless and a foolish thing to pray? Because what, after all, is prayer, but just children talking to their father? If it is true that God is our Father, then prayer is the most natural thing in the world; and when we say that something is the most *natural* thing in the world, what do we mean? What do we mean when we say that it is the most natural thing in the

world for us to breathe or to eat? We mean by saying that, that when you breathe or when you eat, you are really responding to a vital, deep-seated necessity of your nature. If you ceased to breathe or if you ceased to eat, how long do you suppose you would live? And when it is said that prayer is the most natural thing in the world, what is meant is, that prayer is an absolute necessity, if we are to live the sort of life that God, our Father, expects us to live. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that, in the life of Jesus Himself, prayer occupied not only a large place, but a most vital and commanding place. You just glance through the story of the life of Jesus again when you have time, and see for yourself how, again and again and again, sometimes for a whole night, Jesus goes away by Himself and prays to His Father in heaven. And it is as plainly written across the life of Jesus as anything that is written there, that He believed, that He felt sure, that life would be an impossible thing to Him without this communion with His heavenly Father! It was natural with Jesus to pray, just because in His prayer He expressed one of the profoundest necessities of His being.

Let us remember that from that fact we are entitled, in fact, we are compelled, to draw one or two very important inferences, and the first of them is this:—The prayer life of Jesus was associated, as we saw some evenings ago, with the deepest knowledge of God that has ever been possessed by anyone in the whole history of the human race. If, for Jesus, with His supreme knowledge of God, it was a natural and a necessary thing to pray, who are we, with our poor shallow

knowledge of God,—as the knowledge of the very best and wisest of us is poor and shallow compared with His,—to rise up and say that it is quite useless and foolish to pray? From the prayer life of Jesus we draw an inference which is forever valid to the mind of the man who believes in Jesus, and that is, that prayer must have a central place in every Christian life!

Then there is another. Not only was this prayer life of Jesus bound up with His perfect knowledge of God, but the prayer life of Jesus was bound up with something else which we noted on a former occasion, namely, with the absolutely sinless character of Jesus Himself. That is an interesting thing, isn't it? Are you a sinless man? Have you overcome every last element of evil in your nature? Are you free from sin, in thought and word and deed? If you are, then I for one am prepared to listen to you and to give some weight to your judgment, when you come and tell me that, from day to day in your sinless experience, you find it fruitless and valueless to pray. But if you are a sinner, like myself, striving every day against temptation and day by day being laid by the heels in the dust,—then I say to you that I attribute no value to your word when you tell me that you do not believe in prayer. And when I think of the life of Jesus, free from sin and filled with prayer,—because I believe that these two qualities of the life of Jesus were very far from being unrelated,—I believe that the strength and the beauty and the glory of the life of Jesus were there, because of the communion which He held so constantly with His Father!

We find Jesus offering to God prayers of thanksgiving. We read in the New Testament that from time to time Jesus would stand among His friends and sometimes among His enemies, too, and lift up His eyes to heaven and say, "I thank Thee, O Father." Only the other day I was reading something that had been written by a great English preacher, and what do you think that preacher suggested? He suggested that men and women in our day are becoming less and less sensible of what they owe to God, and that in our Christian lives there is far too little expression of gratitude to God. Oh, let us remind ourselves at this Christmas season of the boundless loving-kindness of our Father Who is in heaven! And in the midst of our joy, let us take a few moments, as we look around our homes and the homes of our friends, and see them filled with joy and with every good thing, and as we see the homes that have been filled with sorrow, touched with a kind of heavenly joy in the assurance that God gives to His disconsolate children,—let us spare a moment to raise our eyes to heaven and say, after the manner of Jesus Christ our Master, "I thank Thee, O Father!" What a dreadful thing it is to think that we should ever cease to be grateful to God; and if we are grateful, let us express it!

Sometimes we hear people say of a certain kind of a man, "Oh, he is very grateful for all that you do for him, but he doesn't like to say anything about it." I think that is a poor sort of man. If somebody has shown you loving-kindness in your own life, in your business affairs, wherever it is,—it seems to me that it is your bounden duty as a decent citizen, to say

nothing of your character as a Christian gentleman, to express your gratitude for the good thing that has been given to you or done for you. And so it is with God. Let us take greater delight in *expressing* our gratitude to God, Who is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

In the second place, we find Jesus asking God in His prayers for different things for Himself. Oh, yes, Jesus believed in petitionary prayer. Go with Jesus, after you have taken your shoes off your feet, into the garden of Gethsemane, and there you will learn, before His face, the most awful lesson that the world was ever taught in this matter of petitionary prayer. Jesus prayed to God that day the most dreadful petitionary prayer that was ever prayed—"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Jesus believed in petition and, because He believed in it, we have a right to believe in it also. Sometimes we are afraid to offer God our petitions, in case He won't grant the things we ask for. It is none of our business. Do you remember, in this awful petition of Jesus, how He said, "Yet not my will, but thine, be done"? Tell God what you want. Spread before Him all the passionate desire of your soul and then leave it to Him. But if we are to argue from the fact that we are not sure whether God will give us what we ask, that we ought not to ask for anything, then we are getting pretty near to the position of a man who would say that a *child* really has no right to ask *his father* for anything. If there is any father in this room tonight whose child has not asked him the last few days for a great many things. I would like to know that child's name and nature, because I

suppose most fathers are deeply troubled because of the things that the child wants, and is not going to get. But that is not going to do him any harm, because when he gets what he is going to get, he will be so pleased that he will forget about the other things he wanted.

That is the way with us. God is going to give us great good gifts in answer to our waiting, faithful prayers. But it is our duty to ask, to talk about the desires of our soul with this Father Who is in heaven, and I hope that in your prayers, as well as gratitude, there will be petition; and as the years go on, our petitions will become wiser and wiser, just as your children, as they grow up from year to year, will grow wiser and wiser in the things they ask for at Christmas or any other time.

The third thing we notice in the prayers of Jesus is, that He spoke to God constantly about the needs of other people. Jesus had the whole world in its dreadful neediness always in his imagination, and He used to pray to God for the men and the women and the little children of the world. In other words, Jesus believed in and practised intercessory prayer. That is another difficulty some of us have, and perhaps some of us say to ourselves, "If I pray for myself, maybe it will do some good; but what good are my prayers for another man?" The simple truth of the matter is, that the history of the world is filled with instances of men and women who have been encouraged, strengthened, sent on their ways rejoicing, of men and women who, in not a few cases, have had their lives wholly changed, by the prayers of someone else.

In the slums of the city of London, there was a wretched little boy who was rapidly dying of disease, but he had learned to know God and to love Christ; and in the same tumble-down tenement there lived a drunken cab driver, but the drunken cab driver had a tender heart; and from time to time, when he came in from his weary days in the streets of London, he would go into the suffering boy's room and talk with him a little while, sometimes bringing him simple gifts. The poor boy's heart was broken because his friend was so drunken, and one night, as the cab driver stumbled up the rickety old stairs, he heard the boy talking. When he got to the door, he found the little fellow kneeling in his bed, praying to God, and what he was saying was this: "Oh God, don't let this dear friend of mine get drunk any more. I love him so much that I don't want him to be a man like that." The old cab driver waited until the boy was finished, then went in and sat by his bed. He said to him, "Do you really love a poor old waif like me?" The boy said, "Yes, I love you; but you are not a waif; you are a man." And the cab driver went away to his bed and thought things over. Soon the boy died. And as that old man sat in his cab in the streets of London, he thought of that face and that little prayer, and the result was that he was absolutely won to God, and cleanness and decency of living; and the beginning of it was the prayer of a little child in the slums of London!

Let no man ever dare to say that intercessory prayer counts for nothing in the world. If Jesus believed that, do you think He would have interceded for His

friends on earth? Do you think He would ever live to make intercession for us, if He believed there was no use? Listen to me. I don't want to be too dogmatic and I don't want to thrust my notions of great, big, deep, difficult subjects down the throat of any other man,—but at this Christmas season I do want to say to you, just as tenderly and as emphatically as I can, that if tonight you make up your mind that, instead of taking the judgment of some person who knows very little about it, and nothing at all from his own experience,—you will take the judgment of Jesus Christ on this supreme matter of prayer; and if you make up your mind that from tonight you will follow the example, not of the man who never prays because he thinks it is a useless waste of time, but of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the holy Redeemer of the World, Who was constantly found upon His knees in prayer,—then I will promise you that you will never regret that decision! There are great difficulties in connection with this matter of prayer, difficulties that are raised by scientists, by philosophers, by unbelieving men; but I want to say to you that until I discover someone whose judgment and whose character are to be more completely relied upon, in this grave and solemn matter, I am going to take the judgment and follow the example of Jesus! And tonight I would invite you to do the same thing!

What Jesus Taught Concerning the Kingdom of God



HERE can be no doubt about it, and it is just as well to admit it frankly, that we human beings are very proud people; and our pride often leads us to believe, and sometimes to assert, that this world in which we live is the only world there is, or, at any rate, the only world that is worth talking about. When we read our newspapers or the great works of literature, we often fail to let our thoughts rise above this present world. We forget that there may be worlds that we may know nothing about, floating somewhere in space, where there may be intelligent beings like ourselves, possibly even beings who are far more intelligent than ourselves.

But there is, at any rate, one other world, even if it is invisible, not merely to us but to the most expert astronomer that ever lived,—a world where intelligent beings live, and where the social order is something so glorious and so far above our earthly ways, that we cannot even imagine it. The name that was given by Jesus Himself to that glorious order was Heaven. Jesus believed in it, and He believed that heaven was the name of an order or a society over which the living God presided, and the most remarkable feature of that social order, according to the mind of Jesus, was that every member of it

controlled his life, not partly but wholly according to the will of God. What a wonderful society it must be! God and saints who, in their holy love to Him, offer Him through the eternal days a perfect and unfailing obedience; for they know that the only happiness for God and the only happiness for themselves, and the only prosperity of the community, is to be derived solely and absolutely from such implicit and unquestioning obedience. That society is not wholly foreign to our lives, because there is no man or woman in this building tonight who has not some beloved friend who is a member of it. Those who have been delivered from all the pain and from all the struggle and from all the sorrow of this present earthly life and have gone home to that supernal realm where God is, where God presides, and where all His saints serve Him day and night without ceasing,—nay, not by night, because there is no night there,—that is the kingdom of God. One of the most remarkable utterances that ever fell from the lips of Jesus is one which finds its place in a series of utterances so familiar to all of us that we sometimes, I am afraid, miss its wonder and its glory: “Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven.” The passion of Jesus was that here, on this solid world, men and women like us should so love God that there would go out from their hearts to Him the kind of obedience which is offered to Him in the unseen world by the saints that have been redeemed!

When Jesus Christ came into the world, He brought the kingdom of God with Him; because, by His life and by His teaching He gave men, for the first time

in the history of the race, clearly to see, or as clearly as men can see here below, what sort of a society the heavenly kingdom is. This life that Jesus lived for God and for us in the world, is the sort of life that is lived out yonder in the unseen, holy world; and as that life was lived among men, they beheld its glory and they were drawn to it,—not all men, not at first many men, but here a man and there a man and here another little group of men,—and so the kingdom of God was established here in the world of ordinary mortals; and from the day that Jesus first proclaimed that truth, the kingdom of God has been growing in the world! That is to say, men have been coming more and more to see that the kind of life that Jesus lived and the kind of life that Jesus made possible for us, is the highest kind of life that it is possible for us to imagine. They have been, not always in great crowds, but always one by one through the passing ages, and sometimes in larger companies, pressing in to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God on earth is composed of the same kind of people of whom it is composed in heaven, namely, men and women and little children who have come to love God and who desire nothing more passionately than to be obedient to His holy will! If that is the kind of man that you are, then you are already a citizen of the kingdom of God, and day by day you are striving to see the will of God done on earth even as it is done in heaven. That is why Jesus coupled those two petitions together in the prayer He gave us; because it is by your striving to do that holy will on

earth and by my striving to do it and by our striving to do it together, that His kingdom comes!

What do you suppose, in your more thoughtful moments, is going to be the final destiny of this world on which we live? I believe that it is not extravagant nonsense, but downright truth and sober science, to say that the day is coming,—it may not be yet for a great multitude of years,—but the day is assuredly coming when this earth will have become such a world as will not be capable of supporting on its surface any intelligent life, or any life at all; when there will be no more human life on this planet; when there will be no more marrying and giving in marriage; when there will be no more business, as we know it now in our social order; no more churches; no more theatres; nothing but the world, as cold and dead as “yon dead world, the moon!” That I believe, according to the best scientific thought of the moment, is the destiny of our world! If that is true, you may be inclined to ask, What is going to become of all of us? What is going to become of this human race? Is all this struggle and turmoil, all this patient striving after higher and better things, to count for nothing in the world in the end? That wasn’t the idea of Jesus.

The idea of Jesus was, that men and women on this world, perishing even as it is beneath our feet which sometimes so thoughtlessly trust its solid character, are becoming more and more, under the discipline of His holy grace and love, fit for the higher life of the heavenly kingdom. In other words, down here below, as we build up the kingdom of God upon the earth, we are at the same time really and truly

building up the kingdom of God above; because we are bringing men and women into the knowledge, and from that into the likeness, of Jesus Christ our Lord and Master. The destiny of the world is to be, I believe, a very cold and tragic destiny. The destiny of the kingdom of God upon the earth is to be,—as I believe and as Jesus Christ Himself taught us to believe,—a destiny of unspeakable glory, of immeasurable beauty and might, because at last God shall reign over a kingdom of intelligent beings among whom there shall not be found so much as one individual who will not wholly and constantly offer to Him complete and glad obedience!

There can be no wonder or surprise in our minds, if that is true, that Jesus laid it upon those who loved Him as a very sacred and a very urgent obligation, that they should bring other men and women into this most glorious of all secrets; and it remains our business, whether we face the fact or not, to proclaim first of all by our lives, then perhaps by our lips, and then by every sort of gift that we are capable of bestowing upon such service, the glories of the divine kingdom and to bring men, women, children into the liberties and into the gladness of its citizenship.

We saw a few nights ago all that is required for membership in this wonderful society. According to the teaching of the divine Master Himself, nothing is required but repentance, nothing but that we should turn from our evil ways and come back to God and bow before Him and say to Him that we desire above all things to belong to that group, to that community, to that kingdom in which men love

Him and obey His will. Now therefore, if there is any man tonight who, through this past year, has been outside of that glorious society, who has not been living as a citizen of the kingdom of God upon the earth, I would like to say to him that this is a very good time for Him to take the simple yet decisive step, and to become, just as he sits now in this house, a member of the kingdom of God! Don't you feel drawn to the kind of life that Jesus makes possible even to mortal sinners like ourselves? Don't you feel sure that for you and for all of us there would be greater gladness and richer and more real prosperity, if only you and we would more completely obey the holy law of God, which is a law of love? Let all those who are outside come inside tonight; let us make up our minds that we shall enter the New Year all belonging to the same kingdom, all belonging to the same family; because God's kingdom and God's family are one and the same thing, because the King is the Father!

If we do that, then it will make a great difference with some of us; it will make a great difference with the way in which we live after this. For one thing, as we meet men and women on the streets, we will instantly regard them, either as actual or potential citizens of the kingdom of God, and that will help us to get rid of a great deal of selfishness and a great deal of hatred and a great deal of prejudice and a great deal of suspicion, all of which I dare say lurk in the minds and hearts of many of us this very night. We will treat these men and women on our streets, and we will treat men and women in other

lands, as members of the same society; because, remember, it is not to us merely that the great invitation is given, but it is to all men everywhere,—it doesn't matter what their nationality is, it doesn't matter what their color is, it doesn't matter what their character is. All men everywhere are invited by Jesus to join the kingdom of God! Therefore, we will not despise others; we will not hate others; we will not regard others as somehow in a lower scale than our own; but our hearts will be filled with the sort of passion that filled the very heart of Jesus, to have everyone come in and enjoy the unspeakable pleasure and the unspeakable blessings of this holy society whose head and king is God!

There are lots of difficult questions which scholars discuss in learned books about the Kingdom of God and its past and its future. I am far more interested at this moment in the present of the kingdom of God, and I would like you to take this opportunity of stepping across the threshold and coming in! Let us do that, and if we do, we shall give to the very heart of Jesus, the founder of that kingdom in our world, the deepest, yea, the only sort of satisfaction that can ever come to His waiting, holy heart!

What Jesus Taught Concerning His Second Coming



HERE is nothing in the whole realm of New Testament study which is more certain than that Jesus, during His earthly ministry, taught that He would return. If any person is prepared to dispute that statement, all that I myself could say to him would be that, if he does not believe that Jesus taught the church to expect His second coming, it is absolutely impossible to be sure of anything at all in connection with the New Testament; therefore, we may as well put it in the back of the fire. At the same time, it has to be frankly admitted that New Testament scholars are unanimous, or nearly unanimous, in asserting that it is exceedingly difficult for anybody to be sure that he knows just what Jesus meant, when He said that He would come back, and this difficulty is created by the fact that there is in the teaching of Jesus, on the subject, an apparent contradiction.

In certain passages Jesus is represented as declaring that His return would take place almost immediately after His departure; while in other passages He is represented as teaching His disciples and His friends to expect that the development of the kingdom of God on the earth would be a very slow and a very prolonged development,—apparently indicating that His return was not to be looked for in the near

future, but that it had to be regarded as a distant event. The contradiction which is apparent in the teaching of Jesus on this subject takes another form, because in certain passages He is represented as declaring that His coming back to the world is to be a spectacular event, something which all men will be able to see; while in other passages He speaks of His coming as if it were a purely spiritual thing; so that when we take all these passages and put them together with this apparent contradiction running right through the teaching of Jesus on the subject, our first impression is one of great bewilderment, and we say to ourselves, Who is sufficient for these things? Can we ever understand what Jesus meant at all? It is my belief,—and I think that those of you who have attended these meetings and studied the teaching of Jesus with us, will agree with me,—that if it can be shown that some great truth bulks largely in the mind and in the teaching of Jesus, it is necessary for us to accept it as absolute and final; while, on the other hand, I think we are entitled to say that when Jesus uttered His abundant teaching with regard to this matter of His second coming, He did not mean to leave us wholly in the dark, as to His meaning.

Of course, there are many doctrines taught by Jesus which are, and which must remain, to some extent, mysterious and obscure to all of us; but there is no doctrine taught by Jesus which He left *wholly* obscure, for that would be equivalent to saying that His doctrine on the subject was without value to us. Now therefore, it seems to me that the proper thing for us to do is to take the recorded utterances of Jesus

as they come to us in the New Testament, and see whether we can not find some consistent doctrine running through them all. It is, of course, possible, and for myself, I think it is entirely likely, that many statements made by Jesus on this subject were misunderstood by those who heard them, and that that misunderstanding on the part of the friends of Jesus was responsible for what I have called the apparent contradiction in His teaching.

What I mean is this: From certain utterances of their Master, His friends had drawn a sure and certain inference that He would one day return to them. They were persuaded that He was to return soon, and that all that was meant by the coming back of Jesus, was to be manifested and expressed in an event of history which would occur at an early date. Of course, if that is what the friends of Jesus expected, they were wrong, and it is absolutely impossible for any sane man to deny that; because, in the full and final sense of the term, Jesus did *not* return soon, and the fact that He did not return soon, in the full and final sense of that term, is, I think, a perfectly good ground on which we may base this inference—that the disciples were simply misunderstanding their Master when they expected something that didn't happen; and I am certain in my own mind that Jesus never foretold what never occurred.

But the question is: Is there any sense at all in which Jesus *did* return to the world? Has Jesus ever returned to the world since He made His wondrous promises to His friends? I think He has. I sometimes think that the expression “the second coming of

Jesus" is liable to be misunderstood, from its very form. Jesus has returned more than once to the world since He died upon the cross. He returned, in the very first place, in His resurrection glory, and He lingered in that mysterious fellowship with His disciples for several days. Later still, Jesus returned in the form of a mighty outpouring of His holy spirit on the church, when those who loved Him came, by the moving and the guiding of that spirit, to understand and comprehend Him as they had never understood or comprehended Him before. What was Pentecost, that wonderful Pentecost of the opening chapters of the Book of Acts, but another coming of Jesus into the world?

I believe that, as we look back over the history of the church, we can see the comings of Christ, we can see great spiritual happenings, revivals of religion, as we are accustomed to call them, when Jesus suddenly and on a large scale has come, and has come into His own! What is the meaning of a religious revival save a new coming of the Son of Man to individuals and communities? If there was to be a revival of religion in this city tomorrow which would not include and involve such a new experience of Jesus Christ, I for one would not care to see it. Furthermore, I think we have traced the comings of Jesus, not merely in the happenings of spiritual experience, but in the happenings of what we are accustomed to regard as the secular world, a world which, none the less, is controlled by the same spirit. In the great catastrophes of history, when God has come in dreadful ways to teach His truth to men, when God has made an ex-

ample of some renegade, turncoat, disloyal people, when God has manifested His majesty and the majesty of His law,—Jesus Christ has come anew into the hearts of men, as the revealer of God and as the Redeemer of their hurt and spoiled lives!

We are accustomed to hear a great deal about the harm that the war,—the Great World War,—did to religion and to the religious faith of certain people. I am not prepared tonight to say that there is nobody in the world who lost his faith because of the Great War,—I suppose there are such people,—but I do want to tell you this—that through the Great War and through the tragedy and the tribulation of it, Jesus Christ has come into the hearts and lives of multitudes of men and women. There are men and women all over the world tonight to whom, on the fourth of August, 1914, Jesus meant precious little; and today there is nothing in heaven or on earth that means more to those self-same men and women than Jesus Christ and Him crucified and His everlasting love! I believe that Jesus has come to the world through the War.

And then again, Jesus Himself said, in what is perhaps the most precious passage of the New Testament, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.” Jesus apparently desires us to think of the very act and hour of death as a new coming of our Lord to our spirits. He comes to us when He calls us to Himself. Never did Jesus speak a word whose truth has been more amply and more solemnly vindicated by history, than when He said, “Watch, therefore, for in an hour when ye think

not, the Son of Man shall come." Are you prepared for the coming of the Son of Man? What if it should be your turn this week? There is nothing on earth that is so *certain* as that one day Jesus Christ will call for you; and there is nothing in the world that is more *uncertain* than when that call shall come!

And I think it is true, besides, that Jesus is gradually day by day and year by year, coming to His church and through the church to the world? No greater slander upon history,—and I think that is practically the same thing as to say that no greater slander upon God,—has ever been uttered than the slander that the world is growing worse. The world is not growing worse! Look over the world; take your map out when you go home; look at Africa, India, China, Japan, South America, look at the countries of Europe, and what you will discover is this: That in spite of all the tragedies and in spite of all the enmities, Jesus has, as a matter of fact, been coming to have a larger and a stronger grip of the lives of men and of nations than He ever had before. America is not in the League of Nations—that is a political theme that I have nothing to do with tonight—but the League of Nations is a reality, and, what is more, it is going to be a reality as long as Christian civilization lasts. What I want to ask you is this—Could it have come into existence one hundred years ago? And I say that it could not. Jesus has today a bigger grip of the world than He had one hundred years ago. At the same time, after we have cut it down and after we have refined it as much as we feel inclined to do, the simple fact of the matter remains, that Jesus taught that the kingdom

of God would somehow be consummated by His personal return.

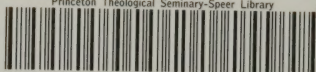
You may say that is something that it is impossible or difficult to believe, under our present conditions. We have come to know much about things since Jesus lived and died; still I am here to hand over to you the very teachings of Jesus Christ Himself, that is, what He taught. What the manner of His coming is to be, I dare not try to guess. What the hour of that coming is to be, it would be sheer folly even to discuss; but what I do press upon myself and upon you is this—that from day to day we should be so engaged in our bodies and our minds and our spirits, that when Jesus comes, we shall not be ashamed before Him at His coming!

I brought a book down tonight with me;—that is a thing I never do, except to bring the Bible,—because I wanted to read a sentence to you which I thought you would like. It is this: A lady once asked John Wesley, “Suppose that you knew you were to die at twelve o’clock tomorrow night? How would you spend the intervening time?” “How, indeed?” he replied. “Why, just as I intend to spend it now. I should preach this night at Gloucester and again at five to-morrow morning. (Think of people going to a service at five o’clock in the morning). After that, I should ride to Tewkesbury, preach in the afternoon and meet the societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin’s house who expects to entertain me, converse and pray with the family as usual, retire to my room at ten o’clock, commend myself to my

heavenly Father, lie down to rest and wake up in glory."

In other words, his preparation for the Lord's coming was, to go about the ordinary tasks of life. When Jesus comes, let Him find us waiting for Him, in the performing of the highest kind of service of Him and of our fellows, to which we can lay our hands!

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